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Privatization and Increasing the Role of the Public as Current Trends in Security Provision

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- **What kind of personnel and financial challenges do security forces in Europe face today?**
- **How do they try to cope with these challenges?**
- **What models of security privatization and volunteer involvement can be identified?**

Summary: At present and in the medium-term perspective, the security systems of most European countries are challenged by a number of social and economic trends: demographic change and the selective withdrawal of state authority from the security sphere. This process has been accelerated by current efforts to reduce public spending. This briefing describes the approaches of several European countries in relation to the aforementioned trends, outlining the potential negative repercussions of these changes within the institutional framework of security.

Introduction

Recent years and decades have given rise to a number of trends that influence the models and instruments of security provision in EU member states. European societies are ageing and becoming more heterogeneous due to interstate migration. These changes in the demographic profile of European populations necessitate the application of different security standards and specifications. The national security systems (including the police, the army, intelligence services, and fire and rescue services) are mostly professionalized. Also, they face a long-term process of staff downsizing and voluntary resignation (especially of army and police members). This contributes to the rivalry between security forces, increasing the competition for the "ideal force member" (recruit), able to meet the high health, educational and performance criteria. The demands for expert qualifications (skills in technology operation and soft skills) are growing.

All the above is taking place at a time when institutions of the security system face a number of new requirements and they need to respond more effectively to previously unknown or insignificant security challenges. Meanwhile, the system is being destabilized by the already implemented or planned cuts within specific budget chapters and sub-chapters.

The finance ministries of EU member states thus directly co-determine the scope of security policy ambitions.

In many countries, employment conditions offered by security system institutions are not competitive with other job and career offers on the labour market. Every economic recovery sends a shock through the security forces, regularly causing a decline in the number of job applicants. The situation is further aggravated by frequent changes of service rules and conditions (salaries, annuities).

As employers, security system institutions are not always competitive with other job or career offers

Many countries' security sectors show a lack of systematic staffing policy (not only with regard to personnel in active service) and experience a serious decline in the number of middle-aged experts, who play a main role in capability regeneration. The result of the ill-conceived staffing policies is thus a great waste of funds: the professional instruction and on-the-job training of a high-quality specialized administrative worker or security forces member takes a long time and requires substantial investment. If the trained employee subsequently decides to leave the public sector, the sector is losing at least the resources invested. A number of police workers (including top-quality experts) face financial insecurity and uncertain career prospects, which naturally dampens their professional zeal and affects the agenda entrusted to them. The chronic frustration of such people in itself represents a substantial security risk (potential for corruption, and, in the worst case, even for enemy espionage). What is at stake is eventually not just the quality of public administration personnel, but the elementary loyalty of the rank-and-file members of repressive forces, who could e.g. refuse obedience if given orders to maintain law and order against their inner persuasion. Different countries react in different ways to such challenges (and various approaches can be used simultaneously).

"Withdrawal" of the state and the takeover of certain responsibilities by the private sector

At least since 2007, the state security forces of **Romania** have been "withdrawing" from a number of areas (e. g. the security guarding of government and semi-governmental institutions or of state-owned and partially state-owned companies such as nuclear power stations, embassies or airports; they also no longer provide escorts for overload and oversized transport and the transport of hazardous waste, including burnt nuclear fuel). Private providers have been entrusted even with the transportation of convicts, prison management and witness protection, the protection of court buildings and the maintenance of order in the courtroom.

Army bases and other buildings in **Bulgaria** are guarded by private security companies rather than soldiers. Also, Bulgaria has perhaps the highest percentage of women in the army among all NATO member states (about 12.7 %, of which 1,200 serve in combat troops). The reason is that Bulgarian men show little interest in army service: they consider it low paid or unattractive for other reasons.

The growing role of municipalities and regions

The role of regional and municipal security forces is growing. One current phenomenon is the sponsoring of state security forces from the regional level. Many municipalities in the **Czech Republic** find it necessary to establish or strengthen their own municipal police forces since the members of the state force are too few to police the streets effectively. There is also an increasing pressure on regions, municipalities and companies to "sponsor" police activities, e. g. by providing premises for police stations (free of charge or for a symbolic rent), or contributing toward the cost of petrol, electricity and police equipment.

The support or initiation of volunteer projects

Among EU countries, volunteer police groups exist in the UK, the Netherlands and Estonia. Outside the EU, similar solutions are used in Norway, some localities in the US (assistants to the sheriff), and Canada.

For instance, in **Denmark** more than 50 000 persons serve in the "Homeguard" (*Hjemmeværnet*). Of this number, only several hundred receive wages; the rest are volunteers. In addition to military activities the volunteers also perform tasks that can be classified as

"police duties" (one branch of the Homeguard is called Police Homeguard, *Politihjemmeværnet*). Its members assist the police during one-off events or incidents: keeping order during festivals, searching for missing persons or participating in road safety enforcement operations. Infrastructure protection during natural or man-made disasters is entrusted to Infrastructure Homeguard (*Virksomhedshjemmeværnet*).

Sweden has a special Auxiliary Police Force (*Beredskapspolisen*) that performs certain tasks in the field of military, police and civic protection: prevention of and fight against looting during natural disasters and blackouts, evacuation of endangered buildings or areas, field search for missing persons, maintenance of order during sports matches, directing traffic, general security monitoring, sabotage prevention, and, in case of need, any other standard police activity which does not require special skills. The volunteers from *Beredskapspolisen* do not receive any wages, and even pay a fee for their membership in the association (SEK 100 a year).

The Netherlands: After proper training, the approximately 2 000 police volunteers (*Politievrijwilligers*) can perform most police tasks not reserved for higher ranks. In some cases, the volunteers even have the authority to perform tasks during investigation. Depending on the respective region, the volunteers wear a cloth badge, an armband, a logo or a vest for identification. They are entitled to a symbolic payment for their work (approx. EUR 7 per hour, plus an annual fee and reimbursement of transportation and other costs). As interest in volunteering dropped in recent years, the Netherlands plans to introduce some changes designed to make volunteer service more attractive.

States that accepted long-term trends in advance are ahead of those which adopt the same measures under pressure

Purchasing the services of certified private security providers

The clients of private security firms include both municipalities and "state" security forces.

In **Sweden**, there is a special category of employees of private security firms who are given limited "policing" powers and are often directly hired by the police, forming what is known as "public order patrols" (*Ordningsvakt*). Members of such patrols can handcuff a suspect or use other means of detaining him or her until the police arrive. A person applying for such a job must already be a licensed employee of a private security company and must take an additional two-week training course organized by the district police directorate. First, he or she obtains the relevant authorization for a one-year trial period; later it is renewed for a three-year period. The purchases of patrol services by the Swedish police represent approximately 10 % of the total monthly amount of man-hours and are meant to cover primarily auxiliary police activities.

Malta started building what is called the Local Enforcement System, LES, in 2000. Each municipal assembly determines at its meeting what kind of services will be needed in the given municipality and how much it is willing to pay for them. This requirement is then, directly or through an authorized regional clerk, addressed to a certified private security firm with which the municipality has signed a cooperation contract concerning private security patrol services. The authorized clerk collects the service orders of municipalities within a particular micro-region, coordinating them to achieve the best price/performance ratio. The authorized clerk then consults his or her proposal with a concrete security company, agreeing on a fixed itinerary of future work. As a matter of fact, fines collected by local patrols have already become quite an important part of municipal budgets in Malta. The data for 2008 speak of EUR 5.8 million.

Mergers of existing security forces

Mergers of existing security forces to save money have recently taken place e. g. in Austria (2005), Luxembourg (2000) or Estonia (which has a merged "Police and Border Patrol Corps" as of 1 January 2010).

Simple downsizing of state security forces

Many countries have resorted to a downsizing of their security forces without having a well-thought out substitution plan. For instance, in **Portugal,** the army is planning a rapid reduction of its ranks from 46 000 persons to 30 000.

The police in **Latvia** no longer provide 24-hour service at divisional police stations and the office rooms are maintained without the permanent presence of staff. Other police services of specific nature (intervention unit, forensic science equipment, etc.) are centralized at the headquarters. Outside office hours, general duties officers (patrol police) do not perform preventive service. On weekends the service regime is the same as outside office hours during the week. Preventive policing is thus solely the responsibility of municipal police – provided that such a force has been established in the given municipal area. The situation outlined above (caused by drastic cost cutting in the Latvian state budget) brings a highly increased demand for security services provided by non-government actors – the municipal police forces and private security services.

Policy recommendations

The current functioning of security systems in EU member states can be described as "finance-controlled security". States that identified and accepted long-term trends in advance are now in a substantially better position than countries that adopt the same measures under pressure of the economic crisis.

It is necessary to realize that the security of any state and its citizens depends to a considerable extent on the loyalty of those responsible for security provision. If these people are nervous and distrustful toward their employer, their work can hardly be of high quality.

Today, the sectors of internal security and defence (its institutional components, the individuals involved) require clearly defined, comprehensive political solutions and concepts of future development, especially with regard to the prospect of further staff changes. If there is to be further downsizing, it is necessary to specify the conditions, time horizon, key principles and target staff levels. If the declarations of such intentions are binding, they must be thoroughly consulted with both the opposition and the relevant trade unions and professional organizations.

An ideal institutional and personnel policy in the security field, applicable at any time, must also define clear boundaries for the outsourcing of the security agenda. After all, the state must keep control of the key activities in the security field. The attempts to cut costs through outsourcing may sometimes not only fail to bring any savings, but actually increase the costs of a particular activity – not to mention the related security risks.

Credits

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